

Kailua Christian Church (UCC)
Sunday, July 31, 2022
10:00 a.m. – Morning Worship
Special Guest Speaker, Pastor J.R. Cuevas
“The Character and the Consequences of the Haughty and Humble”

Scripture Reading: LUKE 18:9-14

The Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector

⁹To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: ¹⁰“Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. ¹²I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’

¹³“But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’

¹⁴“I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

Message

In the movie Seven, at the end of the movie, the detective character who Morgan Freeman plays quotes Ernest Hemingway and says “The world is a fine place and is worth fighting for,” and then goes on to say, “I agree with the second part.” Our world is, without a doubt, a messed up place.

There is a reason why they say “Ignorance is bliss.” The more you find out about the world, the more you realize how many things are wrong with the world - not even so much on a natural level, but on a human level. Human society is riddled with sin, with corruption, with perversion, with wickedness. There is a reason why, in Romans 1:18, Paul reminds us that the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. This, we don’t deny. It would be naive to.

But where things become dangerous for a person is when you become so convinced that this world is a messed up place and forget that you had something to do with it. If a person is looking at things correctly from a biblical perspective, the most messed up thing that he sees in the world is himself. This is not about self-deprecation, but about having a clear, honest evaluation of oneself. Just imagine how bad it would be for me to say to you, “The world is a messed up place; but praise the Lord that at least I’m here.” And yet, there are a lot of people who think this way. It is the perspective of what the Bible identifies as the proud or the haughty - the very antithesis of the oh so crucial virtue of humility.

Jesus came to address this very problem. Just like there are many today who are haughty in spirit and failing to exhibit true, godly humility, so was the case back then. Jesus knew that there were many - particularly in the religious establishment of the times - who viewed themselves as righteous and viewed others with contempt. He knew that there were people who had a high estimation of themselves and their own morality, and looked down on everyone else. And so He gave this pointed parable which exposed this reality and warned of the consequences. As the Son of Man who shows favor to all who humble themselves before Him as seen in Luke's account, Jesus gives this parable delineating the character of both haughtiness and humility.

The CHARACTER of the Haughty and the Humble

First in Jesus' parable is the character of the Pharisee. Keep in mind that the Pharisee was the most highly esteemed of Jewish society. They were seen as the most devoted to God, the most loyal to the Jewish people, and the most pious in conduct. The Pharisee who Jesus describes in the parable was representative of the those in the audience who Jesus was speaking. He was one who was narcissistic, who esteemed himself as different than others, who didn't see himself as a sinner unlike everyone else, and who thought highly of his deeds. Such a man was not praying to God to praise God, but was praising himself. Such is a picture of the haughty man. Haughty people (or proud people) are arrogant, always comparing themselves with other people and thinking critically of others. The haughty person is not defined by whether a person recognizes something as sin, but rather by his failure to identify himself as sinful like everyone else. Beware of being like such a person, who looks at everyone else with disdain while failing to identify your own sins.

Second in Jesus' parable is the character of the tax collector. Keep in mind that, in stark contrast to Pharisees, tax collectors were viewed as traitors and compromisers - the furthest thing from devout and pious. The tax collector in the story here, very much unlike the Pharisee, has nothing glorious to say about himself, and in fact considers himself so unworthy to be in God's presence that he stood so far behind everyone - not seeking to get any attention or recognition - and couldn't even bear to lift his eyes to heaven. But in an act of desperation, humbles himself before God and asks for a propitiation for himself. He wants to be atoned. He knows he needs to be. He is begging for forgiveness, as he identifies himself as the sinner of all those in the temple, in contrast to the Pharisee who sees himself as different from other sinners. This tax collector is the humble man - not because of his title as a tax collector but because of his conduct and his genuine petition before God. Such is the picture of a humble person. Humility is not about tolerating sin or embracing sin. Humility is about recognizing yourself as a sinner just like everyone else, and seeing yourself for who you really are before God. Such humility expresses itself in private and deep contrition before God as well as genuine compassion toward others (as opposed to disdain). Humility is not about failing to identify sin as sin. Humility is about truly seeing yourself as the chief of sinners.

The CONSEQUENCES for the Haughty and the Humble

After describing the portraits of both the haughty man and the humble man, Jesus gives the shocking conclusion to the parable. It is the tax collector who went home to his house justified

before God, and not the Pharisee. This would have shocked the audience and angered the religious establishment, but such was the truth. The Pharisees were oblivious to the fact that their self-righteousness was leading them to eternal punishment, and failed to understand that true justification before God comes by faith alone in Christ apart from works. They failed to realize that the person who is truly saved is the one who has faith in the atoning work of Jesus Christ on our behalf.

But what is the underlying reality for which this parable stems? It is this: that everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted. This is referring to the eternal state of man. The one who exalts himself (the continually haughty man) will be humbled (not allowed to enter heaven), but the one who humbles himself (the humble man) will be exalted (ushered into the kingdom of heaven). It is for this reason that Jesus warned the Pharisees that the prostitutes and tax collectors would enter into the kingdom of God before they did. Whether or not a man enters into eternal fellowship with God in heaven is contingent upon this: is he humble or haughty? For if the only people who are saved are those who truly believe that Jesus died on the cross and paid the full penalty for their sins through His death, then only humble people will be exalted in the realm of eternity, for humility is required for one to come to this realization in the first place.

So yes, the world is a messed up place. Just don't ever forget that both you and I had something to do with it.